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Political Crises and the Crystallization of Japanese Constitutional Thought, 1871-1881

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THE MODERNIZATION of Japanese government begins with the Meiji Restoration and the establishment in 1868 of a new central government to replace the Tokugawa Shogunate. The new political leaders of Japan were immediately confronted by serious problems that prevented the formulation of a definite policy regarding the powers and structure of the government. Moreover, there were wide differences of opinion on the alternative policies of modernization or overseas expansion. Consequently, the coalition that carried out the restoration soon disintegrated into bitter factions. Although a small group of Satsuma and Choshu samurai did emerge as a virtual oligarchy in control of the government by 1871, a struggle for power continued throughout the Meiji era.

The main principles of government as finally expressed in the Meiji Constitution were formulated in the decade 1871–1881, a period of intense nationalism and acute political crises. In 1872–1873, the demand for war with Korea by the factions led by Saigo Takamori and Itagaki Taisuke precipitated a political crisis and initiated a careful consideration of constitutional government among the oligarchs. This discussion was accelerated in 1874 by a reactionary armed resistance to modernization, and the oligarchs, who needed popular support, were forced to make political concessions to the advocates of representative government and to promise that a constitution would be established. Finally, the "cabinet crisis" of 1881 caused the government to set a date for the inauguration of parliamentary government based upon a written constitution.

While the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate stimulated discussions concerning political theory and constitutional government among Japanese intellectuals,[1] leaders of the new central government

[1] For a list of important works on constitutional government written in Japanese during these years see Osatake Takeki, *Ishin zengo ni okeru rikken shiso* (Constitutional thought before and after the restoration) (Tokyo, 1929), II, 223.

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like Kido Koin and Okubo Toshimichi regarded constitutional government as a vague, distant goal. They were content to delegate to others the task of studying Western constitutional theory and practice.[2] Since they were still engaged in the consolidation of the political power of the central government through the abolition of the feudal system, they were content to govern from day to day. Yet, at this early date, Okubo and Iwakura Tomomi[3] had come to feel that the government's program of reform and modernization could best be implemented under a political system that would prevent the development of factionalism. In fact, Iwakura, who became the leading advocate of an authoritarian regime, regarded the early experiments in representative government as the main challenge to the political power of the oligarchy.[4]

The serious dispute within the government over the issue of war with Korea ultimately caused Kido and Okubo to formulate a more definite policy regarding a constitution. In this crisis the government faced the crucial problem whether to embark upon expansion or to concentrate upon domestic reform and modernization. The arguments of those who gave priority to reform revealed an increasing concern with the problem of government organization. For example, Kido for the first time expressed the need of establishing a constitutional monarchy to facilitate Japan's development as a modern nation. While abroad as a member of the Iwakura mission in 1871–1872, he displayed a keen interest in Western political theory,[5] and upon his return home, at the time of this crisis in 1873, he presented a written opinion urging the establishment of a constitution.[6] Kido felt that a constitution was needed to provide a legal foundation for the powers and structure of the government. In his memorial he explained the advantages of constitutional government based upon the will of the people. He pointed

[2] Suzuki Yasuzo, *Nihon kempo shi gaisetsu* (Outline of the history of Japanese constitutional government) (Tokyo, 1941), 43–46.

[3] Iwakura Tomomi was a former *kuge* or court noble who was an ally of Satsuma and Choshu in the anti-Tokugawa movement. Until his death in 1883 Iwakura, who held many important posts in the Meiji period governments, remained fearful of the application of Western political theory to Japanese government, for he felt that a Japanese constitution could not be completely fashioned from European systems of government.

[4] Osatake Takeki, *Nihon kensei shi taiko* (An outline of Japanese constitutional history) (Tokyo, 1938), I, 279. For a discussion of the experiments in representative institutions in the period 1868–1871 see George Beckmann, "The Meiji Restoration and the Constitutional Development of Japan 1868–1871," *Hogaku kenkyu,* XXVI (1953), 458–468.

[5] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko,* I, 310.

[6] "Discourse of Kido Takayoshi upon his return to Japan 1873" in W. W. McLaren, "Japanese Government Documents," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan,* First Series, XLII (1914), 567–577. Hereafter cited as McLaren, *JGD.*

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out, however, that since Japan had not reached this level of political development, the situation required at best a gradual approach to the establishment of popular government. In the meantime, the Emperor and his officials should carry on the administration on behalf of the people.[7]

The advocates of priority for modernization, whose victory in the war question was narrow but decisive,[8] approved Kido's suggestion to consider at greater length the matter of a constitution. In November, 1873, the government appointed Ito Hirobumi and Terashima Munemori to begin a general study of constitutional government. To facilitate their work, Ito and Terashima first sought the opinions of Kido and Okubo.[9]

Ito first consulted Kido, who expressed views similar to those of his original memorial.[10] Kido was strongly influenced by the need for vigorous political leadership to carry out the program of modernization. He felt that the core of political power should remain in the hands of the oligarchs as responsible representatives of the Emperor. He justified their domination on the principle of imperial control over administration, foreign affairs, and the army and navy. He was unwilling to make any real concessions toward the establishment of popular government. Consequently, he proposed a bicameral legislature of appointed representatives, but his treatment of legislative power was vague and confined to the statement that parliament would participate in the dis-

[7] McLaren, *JGD,* 573. Kido stated: "By this means he will gradually lead them forward in the path of enlightenment. Such a course is consonant with natural principles, and I am inclined to believe that upon this idea was founded the thought of the Empire. . . . My belief is that although Japan has not reached that stage where everything is submitted for the sanction of a parliament, in the weight which the Imperial Command bears with it and the importance of the business transacted, our country differs not a whit from those countries of Europe and America whose government is carried on on the principles of executing the wishes of the people and it is important that our officials should not be forgetful of their responsibility."

[8] The leaders of the "war party," outwitted by the astute political maneuvering of Iwakura and his group, found it impossible to remain in the government. Saigo Takamori, Itagaki Taisuke, Goto Shojiro, and Eto Shimpei resigned from the *Dajokan* and Soejima Taneomi left the Foreign Office. Their resignations ended any pretense of a four-*han* coalition since the new government was characterized by greater concentration of power in the hands of the members of the "peace party." For a list of the personnel of the government see Fujii Jintaro and Moriya Hidesuke, *Sogo nihon shi taikei; meiji jidai shi* (A synthesis of Japanese history: the Meiji period) (Tokyo, 1940), 492–493.

[9] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko,* I, 317.

[10] The following discussion of Kido's constitutional thought is based upon a list of written suggestions that he submitted to Ito in November 1873 and a draft constitution that is ascribed to him. Both of these documents are included in Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko,* I, 317–318, 324–345.

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cussions by which the Emperor enacted laws. He also insisted on veto power for the Emperor. In emergencies, moreover, he emphasized that the Emperor should be empowered to issue ordinances with the force of law. The judiciary should also be centralized under the powers of the Emperor, though Kido conceded that all Japanese had "certain inherent rights conferred by heaven" which protected them from unlawful arrest and trial as well as unauthorized invasions of their privacy. As a final note, Kido would have the ministers of the army and navy selected from among high ranking military and naval officers. These proposals were based upon belief that the people of Japan were not prepared to shoulder the tremendous responsibility of government, yet he did make important suggestions regarding the development of political consciousness and experience among the mass of the people. He acknowledged that parliament should eventually be an elected body and he placed great emphasis upon the right of popular petition. He urged that educational facilities be expanded, and he expressed the hope that the government would soon see fit to establish local assemblies in the prefectures, cities, and towns.[11]

Ito next consulted with Okubo, who stated[12] that the nation was not ready for a constitution and strongly urged that Japan's ultimate system of government be compatible with its own political needs and conditions. Thus he defended absolutism as characteristic of Japan and urged that the government introduce no rash changes. Feeling that the American and English systems of government were not suitable because they were founded on the concept of popular sovereignty, he urged that Prussia or Russia be studied as a model.[13] In the meantime, he suggested that the government should remain for some time under the *Dajokan* system, with its high degree of centralization and lack of distinctions between executive, administrative, and legislative powers and functions.[14] Okubo's conception was that Japan's eventual constitution should provide a highly centralized administration without any strong popular element.

While the government was formulating a constitutional policy which

[11] *Ibid.*, 318.

[12] For the text of this document see Miyakoshi Shinichiro, ed., *Nihon kensei kiso shiryo* (Basic historical materials on Japanese constitutional government) (Tokyo, 1939), 106–122.

[13] *Ibid.*, 106. See also Okubo's letter of January 27, 1873, to Nishi Tokujiro quoted in Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko*, I, 346. In these early years of the Meiji era there are numerous references to the government system of Prussia in the papers of Okubo and Iwakura.

[14] For a description of the *Dajokan* system, which had taken form by 1871, see Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko*, 253–260.

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would justify the postponement of representative government, a new political crisis erupted. Early in 1874, Itagaki and his followers renewed their attack upon the Satsuma-Choshu monopoly of political power and demanded the establishment of a national parliament.[15] Simultaneously, the government was confronted with the beginnings of sporadic but serious armed resistance to its policies of modernization. To the leaders of the government, this reactionary opposition to modernization was much more serious, especially since it was based upon the military power of discontented former samurai. Moreover, in the background there lurked the threat of a unified armed opposition under the leadership of Saigo and Satsuma. As a result, Okubo made a determined effort to persuade Kido, who had resigned in opposition to the Formosan expedition,[16] and Itagaki to rejoin the government in order to gain a maximum of support for the administration.

In January, 1875, Okubo confided his intentions to Ito, who proposed a reorganization of the government in order to persuade Kido and Itagaki to rejoin it. Ito's proposals were, in fact, an acceptance of Kido's emphasis upon the gradual development of constitutional government. They provided for the establishment of an appointed Senate (*Genroin*) and a lower house of prefectural governors (*Chihokankaigi*) as a preparation for a national parliament and the creation of a supreme court (*Daishinin*) as the nucleus of an independent judiciary. Kido and Itagaki met with Okubo at Osaka in February, 1875, accepted Ito's proposals, and agreed to resume office in the government.[17]

By March 28, a committee made up of Okubo, Ito, Kido, and Itagaki completed a plan for the reorganization of the government, and on April 14, their draft was made official by an imperial rescript which proclaimed that "constitutional government [would] be established in gradual stages."[18] In theory, the new government was based upon the

[15] The government's position regarding a parliament was stated by Kato Hiroyuki, who cautioned against rash action and defended the policy of "gradualism." For the text of this statement see McLaren, *JGD,* 433–439.

[16] Kido's ill health resulted in a decline of his influence in the government since he was unable to attend many sessions of the *Dajokan;* moreover, his resignation in 1874 over the Formosan expedition temporarily left Okubo as the unchallenged leader within the government. Kido opposed the expedition on the same grounds as the war with Korea, and he criticized Okubo for using Formosa as a compromise with the "war party" and as a means of diverting attention from domestic politics. Fujii and Moriya, *Sogo nihon shi taikei,* 494–495.

[17] *Ibid.,* 506.

[18] For the text of this document see Miyakoshi, *Nihon kensei kiso shiryo,* 186. The English translation which appears in McLaren, *JGD,* 41–42 is not complete, having omitted the direct promise of constitutional government.

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"separation of powers" with the *Dajokan* as the supreme executive body exercising power in the name of the Emperor, the *Genroin* and *Chihokankaigi* as a bicameral legislature, and the *Daishinin* as the judiciary. However, the *Dajokan* was scarcely changed and remained as the focal point of the oligarchy's power. The *Genroin* proved to be nothing more than an advisory body whose main function was to deliberate upon bills submitted by the *Dajokan,* which had the power to indicate whether these bills were for decision or simply for study and discussion. The *Dajokan,* furthermore, continued to have the power to issue legislation on it own authority, having only to submit its measures for the inspection of the *Genroin.*[19] The meetings of the *Chihokankaigi* were merely convocations of prefectural governors in routine administrative conferences under the control of the Home Minister.[20]

In accordance with the Emperor's promise of the gradual development of constitutional government, the *Dajokan* ordered a committee of *Genroin* members, under the chairmanship of Prince Arisugawa Taruhito, president of the *Genroin,* to direct the drafting of a constitution. Between September, 1876, and May, 1878, this committee compiled four draft constitutions, the last of which was submitted to the government for its consideration.[21] This constitution provided for several important checks upon the powers of the Emperor and consequently may be regarded as a step in the direction of parliamentary government. While the Emperor would remain as the fountainhead of political power, his powers would no longer be unlimited, particularly as to legislative power. This draft constitution attempted to create a balance regarding legislative power between the Emperor and parliament. All bills would be submitted to parliament by the Emperor, who would have the ultimate power of veto, but all bills would require the consent of both houses. Budget and tax bills were exceptions to this rule; they would require the consent of only the popularly elected lower house.

The oligarchs, whose power has been strengthened greatly by the suppression of the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, reacted unfavorably to the draft constitution. They opposed the provisions regarding legislative power, particularly the articles concerning the budget and taxes. Spe-

[19] McLaren, *JGD,* 43–53.

[20] *Ibid.,* 505–512.

[21] For the text of this document see Asai Kiyoshi, *Genroin no kempo hensan temmatsu* (An account of the compilation of the draft constitution by the *Genroin*) (Tokyo, 1946), 72–86.

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cifically, Ito feared a financial check upon the powers of the government through parliamentary control of the annual budget and imperial expenditures; he had in mind the historical example of the decline of the power of the British king. He was also apprehensive of the provisions regarding legislative power in general, for he considered them to be steps in the direction of parliamentary supremacy.[22] Iwakura was even more concerned;[23] together with Ito, he took the lead in ordering the *Genroin* committee to revise the draft to make it conform more closely to the traditional imperial system (*kokutai*).[24]

In December, 1879, at the suggestion of Iwakura, the Emperor asked the leaders of the government to submit written opinions regarding the *Genroin* draft constitution and to comment upon the advisability of establishing a constitution and national parliament.[25] While the opinions of the oligarchs differed in detail, all were united on two points. They agreed that a constitution should be promulgated in the future and that the Emperor should maintain his paramount political powers, and they expressed the opinion that the government should proceed gradually in the establishment of a parliament. Each outlined the manner in which the gradual development of popular participation in government was currently being implemented,[26] and each cited the imperial rescript of 1875 as the ultimate sanction for the government's policy.

In December, 1880, the *Genroin* committee submitted a revised draft constitution.[27] Although the members of the committee had continued to seek some satisfactory compromise between the Japanese imperial system and parliamentary government, the new draft contained no significant changes, only a modification of the wording regarding the roles of the Emperor and parliament in the legislative process. This second draft again omitted any difinite statement on the source of political power within the state, but the drafters seem to have implied that sovereignty was shared by the Emperor and parliament.

This revised draft was no more favorably received by the oligarchs than the first.[28] They regarded it as a dangerous compromise, for while

[22] Suzuki Yasuzo, *Kempo no rekishiteki kenkyu* (Historical study of the constitution) (Tokyo, 1934), 162–163.

[23] Miyakoshi, *Nihon kensei kiso shiryo*, 217–221.

[24] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko*, I, 477–478.

[25] This order was addressed to Ito, Yamagata Aritomo, Kuroda Kiyotaka, Oki Takato, Inouye Kaoru, Yamada Kengi, and Okuma Shigenobu.

[26] The establishment of *fu* and *ken* assemblies in 1878 was consistent with this policy.

[27] For the text of this document see Asai, *op. cit.*, 161–174.

[28] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko*, II, 665.

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it still did not go so far as to provide for the establishment of responsible parliamentary government, it was a step in that direction. Ito and his colleagues were aware that parliament would be able to check the absolute authority of the government since there would be no imperial ordinance power or governmental financial independence. That these measures were important can be seen in the great care taken by the oligarchs to provide for them in the Meiji Constitution of 1889. Finally, in March 1881, the government officially rejected the draft constitution; at the same time, the *Genroin* committee was abolished.[29]

The late spring and summer of 1881 proved to be the decisive period with regard to the establishment of a constitution and parliament. The government clearly wanted to postpone action, but by 1881 the "democratic movement" reached such proportions that the oligarchs found it increasingly difficult to ignore the demands for a parliament. Finally, in the spring of 1881, the unity of the oligarchy was broken by the sudden political shift of Okuma Shigenobu, who proposed that parliamentary government be established immediately. This demarche so weakened the solidarity of the oligarchy that, when it was confronted with a serious political crisis in the summer of 1881 as a result of the Hokkaido properties scandal, it was no longer able to withstand popular demands for reform.

The split within the oligarchy was first brought to light in December, 1879, when the Emperor asked for written opinions on constitutional policy and Okuma refused to comply. In March, 1881, Okuma did submit a written report urging that parliamentary representatives be elected by the end of 1882 and that parliament be convened early in 1883.[30] He expressed hope that "the leader of a party possessing a majority of the seats in parliament should be entrusted with the conduct of public affairs, but that he should retire when his party falls into a minority." He emphasized that "constitutional government is party government," and "when a party's program wins the support of the majority of the people that party should come into power."[31]

The motives behind Okuma's sudden liberalism are obsure. He seems to have regarded parliamentary government as a means of liquidating the Satsuma-Choshu oligarchy and personally assuming leadership in the government. Paramount, perhaps, was his ambition, and in this re-

[29] Fujii and Moriya, *Sogo nihon shi taikei*, 238.
[30] For the text of this document see Miyakoshi, *Nihon kensei kiso shiryo*, 311–323.
[31] *Ibid.*, 321–322.

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spect his actions were a phase in the struggle for power between Ito and himself that had developed after the death of Okubo in 1878. Ito, who had succeeded to Kido's leadership of the Choshu faction, had been able to gain the support of his Satsuma colleagues. Okuma, who was from Hizen, had deliberately refrained from getting involved in the Satsuma-Choshu rivalry, but he slowly gained supporters among the more liberal-minded young bureaucrats. While Okuma was a member of the *Dajokan* and was supported by friends in responsible posts, he was held in check by powerful forces representing the interests of Satsuma and Choshu. Thus it seems that Okuma was taking advantage of the increasing pressure put on the government by the "democratic movement" to foster his own ambitions.

The constitutional issue, however, does not tell the whole story of the Ito-Okuma conflict. In the spring of 1881, an important difference arose between them regarding economic policy. In the beginning of the Meiji period, the government had undertaken to develop Hokkaido under a ten-year program of immigration and public works. In 1881, however, when the government adopted the policy of transferring its enterprises to private interests and decided to end its program in Hokkaido, Kuroda Kiyotaka, a member of the Satsuma faction, helped to form a private company which offered to purchase the government properties in Hokkaido for a fraction of their cost over a thirty year period without interest.[32] This transaction was approved by the *Dajokan* in July, but Okuma steadfastly opposed it.

News of the transaction leaked to the press and popular indignation arose immediately. When the leaders of the "democratic movement" used the proposed sale to denounce the "clan oligarchy," the matter soon reached the proportions of a national scandal, and when it became evident that the agitation was in part led by the young followers of Okuma, the oligarchs concluded that Okuma was directing it in the hope that he would be carried into power on the crest of a wave of popular support.[33] Ito felt certain that Okuma's new predilection for the "democratic movement" was based upon his personal ambition. Moreover, Ito gave credence to rumors of a secret anti-government political alliance between Okuma, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and the Mitsubishi Company.[34]

[32] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko*, II, 572–573.

[33] Nakamura Kikuo, *Nihon kindaika to Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Fukuzawa Yukichi and the modernization of Japan) (Tokyo, 1950), 115–116.

[34] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko*, II, 576.

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On this occasion, the government could not ignore the pressure for reform. Thus Ito determined to cancel the inopportune Hokkaido transaction, to dismiss Okuma from the *Dajokan,* and to announce the establishment of a national parliament.[35] After a series of preliminary discussions among the leaders of the government, the *Dajokan* held a session on October 11 to which Okuma was not invited. They agreed to the cancellation of the Hokkaido sale and to the dismissal of Okuma. They also decided to make a public announcement regarding the establishment of parliament. The rest of the meeting was consumed by a discussion of constitutional government based upon a group of principles that Iwakura had formulated earlier as a refutation of Okuma's views.[36]

In July, Iwakura, who had finally come to concede the inevitability of a parliament, had submitted a written opinion for the Emperor's consideration in which he set forth clearly what he regarded as an acceptable constitutional system for Japan. Iwakura's opinion was drafted by Inouye Ki, a young bureaucrat who had come under the influence of Hermann Roessler, a German professor of jurisprudence. Roessler, a protégé of Rudolph Gneist, was an authority on English and German constitutional law. He had arrived in Japan in 1878 and, for the next decade, served as an adviser to the Japanese government on constitutional problems. Iwakura suggested that the *Dajokan* establish its own committee to draft a constitution in secret and submit it to the *Dajokan* for approval. The core of his views regarding constitutional government was summarized in a list of principles to be used as a guide by the committee. These principles may be outlined as follows:[37]

1. The constitution shall emanate from the Emperor and the policy of a gradual approach toward constitutional government shall prevail.

2. The Emperor shall have supreme command of the army and navy, declare war, make peace, conclude treaties, etc.; moreover, the Emperor will direct the national administration.

3. The organization of the cabinet shall not be subjected to the intervention of parliament. Except for those administrative affairs that are of fundamental importance to the state, for which all ministers shall be jointly responsible, each minister shall only be individually responsible for adminis-

[35] Otsu Junichiro, *Dai nihon kensei shi* (History of constitutional government in Japan) (Tokyo, 1929), II, 448–451

[36] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko,* II, 599.

[37] The following discussion of Iwakura's opinions is based upon the text which is included in Miyakoshi, *Nihon kensei kiso shiryo,* 324–337 and the English translation of his main points which appears in Kenneth Colegrove, "The Japanese Constitution," *American Political Science Review,* XXXI (1937), 1040–1041.

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trative affairs under his official jurisdiction. Ministers shall be responsible to the Emperor and not to parliament.

4. Parliament shall consist of two houses: an upper house composed of members appointed by the Emperor and members elected from among the ranks of peers and former sumurai and a lower house of popularly-elected representatives.

5. The election law for the lower house shall include a property qualification for the suffrage, while the electors for the peerage and ex-samurai shall not be subjected to property qualifications.

6. All legislative bills shall be initiated by the government.

7. When parliament does not pass an annual budget bill, the government may execute the provisions of the budget of the preceding year.

8. With regard to the rights of citizens, constitutional provisions of other nations shall be consulted.

Iwakura also expressed his views on the adaptability of foreign systems of government. He felt that the British system of parliamentary government was not suited to Japan's needs because it was not compatible with the institution of Emperor, and he cited the fact that the British king had lost his power to parliament and had become a mere figurehead.[38] On the other hand, Iwakura looked with great favor upon the Prussian system in which the king remained the center of power. He was particularly impressed by the fact that the Prussian king selected his own cabinet which remained responsible to him. In general, Iwakura strengthened the argument for a highly centralized authoritarian government.[39]

The members of the *Dajokan,* who had been thinking along similar lines, accepted Iwakura's thesis that Japan should adapt Prussian institutions to the special needs and conditions of Japan. It was only natural that these men, who had been trained in the feudal, autocratic atmosphere of Tokugawa Japan and catapulted into positions of national power by the Meiji Restoration, should be attracted by Prussian principles of absolutism. With regard to a parliament, they agreed that the government should establish a bicameral legislative body; they decided, however, that the government should not proceed too hastily and that parliament should not seriously restrict the powers and prerogatives of the Emperor.[40]

After the evening meeting of the *Dajokan* broke up, Ito called on Okuma at midnight and asked him to resign. On the following day,

[38] Miyakoshi, *Nihon kensei kiso shiryo,* 329–330.

[39] *Ibid.,* 333, 338.

[40] For the text of their decisions see Miyakoshi, *Nihon kensei kiso shiryo,* 339–343.

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Okuma complied and many of his followers tendered their resignations at the same time;[41] simultaneously, the government announced that the sale of the government-owned properties in Hokkaido was cancelled.[42] Finally, on the same day, the government promulgated an order, in the name of the Emperor, in which it promised to establish a constitution and parliament in 1890. This rescript included a clear warning to those who demanded immediate action. The policy of the government was stated as follows:

> We, therefore hereby declare that We shall, in the twenty-third year of Meiji [1890] establish a Parliament, in order to carry into full effect the determination We have announced. . . . It was with this object in view that in the eighth year of Meiji, We established the Senate, and in the eleventh year of Meiji authorized the formation of Local Assemblies, thus laying the foundation for the *gradual* reforms which We contemplated. . . . Systems of government differ in different countries, but sudden and unusual changes cannot be made without inconvenience. We perceive that the tendency of Our people is to advance too rapidly, and without the thought and consideration which alone can make progress enduring, and We warn Our subjects, high and low, to be mindful of Our will, and that those who may advocate sudden and violent changes, thus disturbing the peace of Our realm, will fall under Our displeasure. . . . With regard to the limitations upon the Imperial prerogatives, and the Constitution of the Parliament, We shall decide hereafter and make proclamation in due time.[43]

The imperial rescript of October 12 was an important victory for the "democratic movement"; by its terms, however, the oligarchs secured a free hand until 1890, a period in which they proved to be able to consolidate their positions and power. Furthermore, it is clear that the main principles of constitutional government had already been determined by the oligarchy. Finally, the extensive activities of the "democratic movement" in the summer of 1881 tended to cement the bond between the Satsuma and Choshu oligarchs, who undertook jointly to prepare for the opening of parliament and to prevent, if possible, the rise of a strong opposition among the people.

[41] Osatake, *Nihon kensei shi taiko,* II, 590–591

[42] *Ibid.,* 588.

[43] McLaren, *JGD,* 86–87.

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